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ABSTRACT

Given the discrepancies between the format of graduate programs in educational administration and the actual demands of the administrative work setting, instructors should refocus instruction to bridge the gap between administrative theory and practice. This document describes one instructor's use of an interactive experiential learning activity designed for students in educational administration classes at the University of Akron in Ohio. Development of the activity is described in terms of focusing questions; rationale; assumptions that directed the activity's structure; relevant research; questions regarding the instructor's responsibility; and questions related to student decisions and outcomes. The process of helping students develop group skills during the activity is described, and student learning objectives are listed. Next, the criteria each group used to assess the effectiveness of its "school" in meeting the future needs of its learners are listed. Student groups focused on meeting selected future needs of their schools while deciding upon the organization, structure, program, and operation of the schools. Last, the nature, purpose, and student documentation of the role playing component of the groups' experience are described. (44 references) (CLA)

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MODEL FOR INTEGRATING KNOWLEDGE THROUGH PRACTICE: UNIVERSITY TRAINING PROGRAM FOR PRINCIPALS

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University preparation programs focusing on the principalships are course driven by state rules and regulations for certification. Course content is determined by the educational administration departments of the training institutions and instructors determine the text, plan student assignments, and curriculum delivery systems. Students enter and exit these programs, expecting to be prepared and able to function effectively within the complex reality of the school setting.

A recent national survey of district and building level administrators found: (a) 46% of 1123 respondents believed that the current requirements of graduate preparation programs were not sufficiently rigorous to meet the demands of educational leadership; and (b) only 6.6% perceived their graduate school preparation as the most beneficial training for their current position. The majority (60.5%) indicated "on-the-job" training was their most significant preparation. Frequently, these individuals criticized the theory-based preparation approach of professors of educational administration.

Discrepancies between the demands of graduate preparation programs and the actual work setting of school administrators exist (Pitner, 1988) and have been identified: (a) Time constraints--reflection vs. immediate action; (b) Role--subservient vs. superordinate; (c) Communication--written vs. verbal; and (d) Affective relationships--rationality vs. emotional barrages (Jacobson, 1990, pp. 35-36). Recognizing these discrepancies, university instructors should refocus

instruction and develop alternative learning activities dispelling negative feelings held by practitioners about the utility of university training programs.

My experiences as building level administrator and as program facilitator with a state principal leadership academy had demonstrated to me that practitioners were more willing to participate in training opportunities that were reality based and relevant to their work setting. They wanted to learn "How to do" as well as "What to do" or "This is why it's done this way." Their view of the principalship was centered in acting and action. Theory would be learned when its application was demonstrated.

Thus, the role of principal as school leader rests not only on an understanding of theory but also of process that results in action. What knowledge should the individual preparing for this role understand? What processes should be understood and experienced? In what manner can the relationships between these be demonstrated? In the reality of the school, what are the applications?

Eisner (1983) asked: "How do we fill the space between the theoretical frameworks and scientific findings we get from educational research and the concrete realities that we face on the job? (p. 9). What follows is one instructor's attempt to "fill the space." An interactive experiential learning activity used with students in educational administration classes at The University of Akron will be presented and student experiences described.

Activity Development

Believing that "practice must become an equal partner with research in preparing educational administrators" (Jacobson, 1990, p. 36), I began the search for information which would justify the purpose and use of an interactive, experiential activity purpose with students. It was my hope that I could develop a learning opportunity which would enable these future administrators the opportunity to become "attentive to patterns of phenomena, skilled at describing what he (or she) observed," (Schon, 1987, p. 322). I focused on locating information which described models/simulations which supported experiential learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1987; Jones, 1980; Jacques, 1984; Gillette & McCommon, 1990; Bolton, 1971).

I was looking for answers to these questions:

1. What learning opportunities would illuminate relationships between theory and the reality of the school setting?

2. What learning opportunities would provide students with a framework within which they could interact and demonstrate an understanding of these relationships?

3. Situationally, what learning opportunities would support thinking and doing?

4. What learning opportunities would encourage the shaping of a personal view of "self" as principal?

5. What learning opportunities would challenge old, preconceived ways of acting yet encourage new, creative behaviors and change?

6. What learning opportunities could blend process and product?

7. What learning opportunities would support internalization and application of knowledge?

8. What opportunities would support adult learning (Knowles, 1978)?

The framework for the design of the learning activity was based on two sets of assumptions: Kolb's (1979) and Lindeman's (1926). Kolb's assumptions supported my own experience and served as a rationale for providing students with this type of learning activity:

1. We learn best when we are personally involved in the learning experience.

2. Knowledge of any kind has more significance when we learn it through our own initiative, insight, and discovery.

3. Learning is best when we are committed to aims that we have been involved in setting, when our participation with others is valued, and when there is a supportive framework in which to learn. (p. xiii)

Lindeman's (1926) assumptions about adult learners directed the activity structure and role that I would play as instructor.

1. Adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that learning will satisfy; therefore, these are the appropriate starting points for organizing adult learning activities.

2. Adults' orientation to learning is life-centered; therefore, the appropriate unit for organizing adult learning are life situations not subjects.

3. Experience is the richest resource for adults' learning; therefore, the core methodology of adult education is the analysis of experience.

4. Adults have a deep need to be self-directing; therefore, the role of the teacher is to engage in a process of mutual inquiry with them rather than to transmit his or her knowledge to them and then evaluate their conformity to it.

5. Individual differences among people increase with age; therefore, adult education must make optimal provision for differences in style, time, place, and pace of learning. (cited in Knowles, 1978, p. 31)

Two aspects also required consideration: (a) Those being trained today will be principals dealing with issues in school settings of the future; and (b) not all students in the class were preparing for building level administration. Thus, finding the answer to the question, "What skills, knowledge, information will these students need to be successful in their chosen administrative role?" was critical if the activity and their experience in it were to be valued.

My goal was to develop an activity within which each student could reasonably share and extend their knowledge base/experience while finding some degree of content/process applicability and relevancy. If students were to realize the value of knowledge as a tool when considering issues and problems, then the content of the activity should assist in this formulation. Reading and considering the literature on change (Fullen, 1982, 1985; Sarason, 1971; Firestone & Corbett, 1988; Huberman, 1984; Peters, 1987; Waterman, 1987), leadership and principalship (Schon, 1987; Blumberg, 1989; Sergiovanni et al., 1984; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Depree, 1989), future trends and demographics (Hodgkinson, 1985; Nanus, 1989; Gardner, 1990;

Waterman, 1987; Drucker, 1989), and effective schools (Davis & Thomas, 1989; Lipsitz, 1983; Edmonds, 1979; Brookover et al., 1979; Rutter et al., 1979) focused on the content.

If I expected that new boundaries of behavior for self and others would be established, then I needed to understand the role process would play in this kind of activity. From the literature, I drew on Bolton (1971), Kell and Cort (1980), McKinley (1980), Hinton and Reitz (1971), Tuckman (1965), Schein (1969), Johnson and Johnson (1987), Stodgill (1959), Homans (1950), Gillette and McCollum (1990), and Jacques (1984) to establish expectations.

Studying current reports recommending changes in training programs for school administrators (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 1989, 1990; National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1990; National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration, 1987; Jacobson, 1990; University Council for Educational Administration, 1987) influenced the activity's direction and intent.

As the activity began to take shape, two sets of questions emerged. One focused and directed attention to the responsibility of the instructor. The second addressed potential student decisions and outcomes.

As instructor, I needed to be able to answer:

1. What should be the activity focus? Process or product? Both?

2. What effect should the content have on the process and vice versa?

3. Is there/will there be a demonstrable effect between the content and the process?

4. What degree of applicability exists between the experience in and results of the activity to the school setting?

5. What instructional delivery systems will be needed to prepare students for the activity?

6. During the activity what will be the areas of concern for the students?

7. During the activity, what types of intervention will be needed to facilitate students' continued participation in the student?

8. How do I determine the effect of participation on the student?

As a participant in the activity, would it force students to find answers to such questions as:

1. How can I motivate people? Will I be able to?

2. Do I give up power or hoard it?

3. How well do I communicate? Do others understand what I mean? Do my words support my actions? Vice versa?

4. How do I make decisions? How do I involve others in decision making?

5. How can I use knowledge as a strategic advantage?

6. What does it mean to be flexible? How can flexibility impact action?

7. What's important in determining school effectiveness? How can I translate a desire for effectiveness into action? Then, how do I know the action is effective?

8. How do schools deal with society's problems? Can schools serve as society's change agents?

9. How does change break habits? Behaviors? Create new?

10. What roles are played by the school's constituencies? What roles can they play? What should they play?

The more I became involved in the development process, the more I became aware of the activity's complexity and the opportunity it could present for students to immerse themselves in a struggle to build reality.

Groups: The Tool for Process Development and Understanding

I was aware of the large amount of time which school administrators spend either as a group member or as leader of a group. Frequently, these groups are formally established, but they often develop as a result of a situation or setting. If formally established, a task is presented complete with a structure and timeline. A product is developed, completed, and delivered to a designated audience. The opportunity to deal with a task which does not have pre-established expectations for its outcome presents a situation within which a group has freedom to design and deliver a product of original design, containing information which its members believe is important.

Although administrators work within group settings, few have had the opportunity to develop either a formal knowledge

base about group functioning or an understanding of group processes that would facilitate task completion. By incorporating expectations for the use of group process skills into the activity, students would be able to apply and practice while extending their knowledge base.

For the purpose of this activity, students enrolled in the class, Principles of Educational Administration, were designated as members of four groups. I examined Homans (1950):

> We mean by a group a number of persons who communicate with one another often over a span of time, and who are few enough so that each person is able to communicate with all the others, not at secondhand, through other people, but face-to-face. (p. 1)

I studied Wells (1980):

> Groups are living systems and group members are interdependent co-actors whose interactions form a gestalt. That gestalt is the elan vital of the group. (p. 55)

and Stodgill (1959):

> A group may be regarded as an open interaction system in which actions determine the structure of the system and successive interactions exert coequal effects upon the identity of the system. (p. 18)

to establish a guidepost, a direction for presentation of information about groups.

It was clear that key to effective functioning of these groups would be the interactions between members. Thus, communication skills that supported problem-solving and eliminated barriers to task accomplishment were developed and practiced prior to the activity's implementation. During class

exercises, students practiced such specific skills as information seeking; clarifying, coordinating, and synthesizing of information; opinion seeking, and giving of information.

The phases of group structure development or the "way the members act and relate to other members" (Tuckman, 1965, pp. 74-78) was introduced and the functional roles which members play during these phases were presented (Schein, 1969).

Affectionately labeled, "forming, storming, norming and conforming," the four phases were described and illustrated. having had access to this information, I anticipated that students would be better able to judge the intent of personal interactions during each stage, see the need for using an appropriate communication intervention. Reducing frustrations about "getting the job done" would redirect the group toward accomplishing the task.

To draw attention to the importance of the task behaviors of the group, "the content of interaction as related to the task" (Tuckman, 1965, pp. 74-78), students practiced identifying tasks and their "ground rules," gatekeeping, compromise building, and consensus. They were provided with examples of dysfunctional group member behavior and appropriate interventions.

Within the context of the group, I expected the student would:

1. Be able to establish clearly stated goals which were relevant to the development of their project and which would drive it to completion.

2. Be able to develop member commitment to the group project.

3. Support communication skill development in group members specifically when resolving disagreements over issues, project direction or content and personal power and position and also those skills which demonstrate support of group members.

4. Experiment and practice alternative methods of decision making and problem solving.

5. Recognize the development phases of group formation and the types of interactions occurring within these.

6. Be able to determine strategies and interventions for moving the group to task completion.

7. Extend their personal knowledge base through the groups sharing in development of an information pool.

During the early stages of the activity development, I had realized that its use would place increased demands on the instructor. I had to be certain that students would have exposure to and knowledge of information and skills which they would be using in the activity. It was necessary to anticipate the multiple directions which their final products could take and to be prepared to support these efforts.

Within the context of preparing students for the activity, various instructional strategies including cooperative learning were introduced. To support decision making, information and practice on consensus building, conclusion drawing, and questioning techniques were presented. To build an understanding

of collaboration, team building and empowerment, the use of power and its role in the organization were discussed. Role definitions were introduced and related to change in the organization. Forecasting and its use as a basis for planning was practiced. Using various assessment instruments, "Who I am" and "Who I want to be as a leader" were determined and discussed with in situational and cultural contexts. Not only were students expanding their knowledge base, but so was the instructor.

Thus, the components of the activity were put in place. I had, as Knowles (1978) suggested, developed

> a set of procedures for involving the learners in a process with these elements: (1) establishing a climate conducive to learning; (2) creating a mechanism for mutual planning; (3) diagnosing the needs for learning; (4) formulating program objectives (content) that will satisfy these needs; (5) designing a pattern of learning experiences; (6) conducting these learning experiences with suitable techniques and materials and (7) evaluating the learning outcomes and rediagnosing learning needs. (p. 108)

The stage was set. The project began. What follows are student reactions to their involvement in this experiential learning activity as reported through their reflections as an individual and as a member of a group.

The Activity Framework:

Our Schools of the Future

The purposes of this activity were twofold: (a) To provide students with the opportunity to be part of an experiential learning group, one in which focused "on developing members' understanding of group-level process and of their own

behavior in the group" (McCollom & Gillette, 1990, p. 3); and (b) to increase and extend student knowledge base about schools as organizations, effective schooling, school's role in dealing with societal issues, leadership behavior, decision making, and program planning.

Developed through group effort would be a plan for a school which met the activity's stated objective:

> Each group will develop an effective school which will meet identified future needs of its constituents and the community. The school and its proposed program will meet ethical, social, and legal implications while providing solutions to these needs and their resultant issues. Each member of the group would be proud to become principal of the proposed school.

Based on the literature and research on effective schools (Brookover et al., 1979; Edmonds, 1979; Lipsitz, 1983; Rutter et al., 1979), the following criteria were presented for student groups to use in judging the effectiveness of their schools in meeting the future needs of its learners:

1. The importance of student learning would be demonstrated.

2. Commitment to continuous school improvement would be illustrated at all levels of the school's organization.

3. Long-term goals for student performance would be established.

4. Student educational activities would focus on student performance goals.

5. A time frame for planned change to occur would be outlined.

6. A plan and criteria for determining program effectiveness and success would be included.

7. Availability and use of technical support in curriculum/instruction, community involvement and decision making would be shown.

Nanus (1987) stated: "As a future-creative leader, you should be particularly interested in the future directions, ambitions, and prospects of major stockholders in your organization" (p. 111). To orient student planning for dealing with the future, potential issues with which school leaders would need to recognize, a list of these were presented. It was perceived that these "Future Needs" would direct students to locate and thoughtfully consider information that would prepare them for roles as future school leaders. As instructor, I hoped that dealing with the issues would encourage students to recognize the reality of dealing internally with the effect of external societal forces. Dealing with these issues would force students to develop a knowledge base which in turn would, I hoped, enhance their farsightedness or "alter an existing image of the future of the organization" (Nanus, 1989, p. 108).

The framework for the content of this activity would be criteria from the Effective School literature and future needs chosen by each group. Each student group chose the needs which their school would address. No direction was given to the groups as to which should be chosen, but they were to address several in their planning.

Group decision making began as members focused on choosing the future needs which the group's "school" would address. Within the activity, multiple opportunities to practice and develop decision making skills both as an individual as a group member existed.

Deciding upon the organization, structure, program, and operation of the school while having to consider the impact of selected issues on these was not a simple task for the groups. Weaving the criteria threads through decisions about these encouraged and supported communication in the groups. These student groups did as Jones (1980) described, "making decisions involves searching around for the most suitable decision, analyzing the situation, and constructing hypotheses about what might follow certain decisions" (p. 32).

Students were told, "Do not be bound by what is 'now.' Dream, envision for the future." This expectation for the student "school" was planned to encourage them to consider change and its effect in schools. Fullen (1982) had outlined four aspects of change and their effect on change implementation: (a) Degree of recognition of need; (b) Clarity of goals and means; (c) Complexity--difficulty or extent of change; and (d) Quality and practicality. Student groups struggled with each of these aspects in their planning.

Role playing was chosen as one element of the student experience in their group. Johnson and Johnson (1987) discussed the use of role playing in group activities as "a tool for bringing a specific skill and its consequences into

focus" (p. 24). Through role playing,behaviors and attitudes could be changed and "questions could be raised in discussions that were not covered by instructions. Students were expected to adopt two types of roles: (a) that of a particular person involved with the school; i.e. principal, teacher, student, custodian, or parent; and (b) one in which the student would practice specific group roles; i.e., recorder summarizer, encourager, researcher, or organizer. When adopting the role of the school constituent, the student was to adopt the viewpoint/perspective of schooling which the role supported. The names assigned to the second set of roles described fairly accurately the function the role would play in the group. Since five students were members of each group, only five of the two sets of roles were chosen.

Each student assumed two roles--one constituent, one group--during each group session. These roles were to change at each session and the student assuming the role of principal could not be chairman of a group meeting.

The role playing component was designed to serve several purpose: (a) to build knowledge through changing perspectives gained by adoption of the role; (b) to serve as vehicle through which evaluation of information could occur; (c) to create awareness of group role behaviors; (d) to encourage communication; and (e) to experience the effect of having to deal with multiple personal realities.

To document the activity, students were to present a written report of their "School of the Future." These reports

would serve as the documentation of the knowledge base developed by the student in specific content areas determined through the group decision making process. To document their experiences as a group member, they were asked to reflect on their personal experiences as an individual and also upon the group's. Their reflections were to include descriptions of the roles played and their experiences in them including their effect on the group's process, "new learnings" resulting from their membership in a group, group process and functioning. Problems and working relationships within the group were to be documented. Each group also maintained a log of group meetings which further documented the activities and progress which was made in arriving at the final product. The intent of having student document their experiences in this activity was to encourage them to consider and reflect on their experience. This information also became the basis the preparation of the paper and the report of the results.

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